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Courtroom Drama: Theatre Alumna Practices Law

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – For some, the excitement and anticipation of the first day of college can overwhelm the mind, turning the experience into nothing more than a generic blur of recollections. However, for others, the first day of class can make a long-lasting impact.

While standing in a circle among fellow theatre majors on the very first day of class, Illinois Wesleyan University alumna Samantha Glaudel, class of '93, learned a lesson that would remain with her for the rest of her professional life.

As a student raised his arm to look at his watch, Professor Emeritus John Ficca asked the student what time it was. "The student did not know. Dr. Ficca told us at that point to never make a move without a purpose – otherwise it would not be believable. That lesson sticks out to me every time I do anything in front of an audience – whether the audience is in the theatre, a jury box, or watching my films," said Glaudel.

Although Glaudel graduated from Illinois Wesleyan University with a degree in theatre performance, she immediately went on to pursue her studies in law at Southern Illinois University (SIU) School of Law. Upon graduating with a juris doctorate in 1996, Glaudel worked in the district attorney's office and also had experience in private practice. Between the two jobs, she has had six years of trial work, with a few hundred cases going to trial. Today, Glaudel works as the senior staff attorney for the chief judge in her judicial circuit in Savannah, Ga.

For Glaudel, there is a correlation between acting and the law. "When an attorney tries a case in front of a jury – or even a judge – the attorney is presenting material that tells the story of his/her client's circumstances," Glaudel said. She explained how an attorney has to memorize the facts of the case, comparing them to lines in a play. An attorney must do an opening and closing, which is much like setting the scene. When a client changes testimony, she said, an attorney has to think on his/her feet, which is similar to another actor dropping his/her lines.

"Not only has my theatre background helped me with stage-fright in front of a jury, but it has helped me learn how to memorize facts in a story format," said Glaudel. "And, as an added bonus, theatre majors learn relaxation techniques which have proved to be immensely helpful in stressful cases," she explained.

Though Glaudel chose to follow law after graduation, she said, "the experiences I had at IWU as a student helped me make informed choices as to how I wanted to continue my life after IWU." While still on campus, she even considered leaving the major. "Each time I attempted to change my major, [Professor Emeritus John Ficca] would bring me right back in and tell me to do what was right – which was to remain in the theatre program. He believed in me more than I believed in myself," said Glaudel.

The attorney still remains active in theatre, performing in a number of community productions, films and commercials. She has also served on the Board of Governors for the Little Theatre of Savannah, the longest running community theatre in Savannah.

Advising students to stay with what they love, Glaudel says, “Keep with it, if it is really what you want to do. It does not matter if it is on Broadway, the tiny little beach theatre, or the courtroom – just do it.”

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